

Hum/En 20  
The Epic Tradition  
Winter 2021  
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### *Catalog Description*

For over 2,000 years epic poetry was the foremost genre of literature. The most prestigious kind of poetry was also unusually competitive and self-referential. Virgil imitates and revises Homer, Ovid mocks and criticizes Virgil's political agenda, and Milton transforms the entire epic tradition. We will focus on the differing conceptions of heroism in Homer's *Iliad* and/or *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

### *Requirements and Procedures*

Before each class you must comment on and/or ask questions about the book of the poem assigned in Perusall (accessible through the course website in Canvas). Your comments and questions will not be graded—and please ignore Perusall's scores—but they are required.

By the morning of each class you must send me by email a question on the reading. I will choose one of the questions for a short quiz, which will take place at the beginning of class.

You must write three essays, the first two approximately 1,250 words long and the third, approximately 1,500 words long. The first essay is due January 24 at 11:59 pm, the second, February 28 at 11:59 pm, and the third, March 17 at 5 pm. If you'd like me to read a draft of your essay before submitting it to be graded, I'll try to do so provided that you send it to me a couple of days before it is due.

Roughly two-thirds of your grade will be based on the essays, and the other third on your quizzes and participation in class. You must receive a passing grade on all of the essays to pass the class. If you are not a freshman, the course may be taken for grades only.

### *Required Texts*

Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).  
Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: Norton, 2020).  
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2020).  
Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. David Ferry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

### *Writing Matters*

Caltech's Hixon Writing Center offers a number of resources that you may find useful for supporting your writing in this class, including tutorial support that allows you to discuss a work-in-progress with a professional or peer tutor. You can learn more about the Center, how to make an appointment with a tutor, and about their other resources on their website (<http://writing.caltech.edu>). This video provides a good introduction to the center (<https://youtu.be/6tzPw2daysA>).

Plagiarism is a serious offense against the Caltech honor code and against the scholarly community at large; you should become thoroughly familiar with "Avoiding Plagiarism: Guidelines and Expectations for Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Caltech" (<http://www.hss.caltech.edu/academics/avoiding-plagiarism>).

## *Schedule*

January 5	Introduction
January 7	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 1-3
January 12	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 4-8
January 14	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 9-13
January 19	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 14-19
January 21	Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 20-24
January 26	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> 1-6
January 28	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> 7-12
February 2	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> 13-18
February 4	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> 19-24
February 9	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> 1-3
February 11	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> 4-6
February 16	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> 7-9
February 18	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> 10-12
February 22-24	Writing workshop. You must have completed a draft of your second essay before the workshop.
February 25	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> 1-3
March 2	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> 4-6
March 4	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> 7-9
March 9	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> 10-12